

WASHINGTON STAR

MAR 25 1964

INTERPRETIVE REPORT

A-Defense Slash Suggested

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The problem of limiting deaths and damage in the United States during a nuclear war is beginning to look so difficult and so expensive that some Pentagon officials are seriously proposing that the effort be all but abandoned.

A choice among three proposed alternatives to continue present damage-limitation efforts, scrap them or (as military leaders tend to urge) redouble them—must be made sometime next year, after tests of some weapons are completed.

The defense-policy decision now appears to be the most important and difficult the next administration will face.

If the damage-limiting efforts are abandoned it will mean that the United States is putting full faith in its ability to deter nuclear war and avoid nuclear accidents and misjudgments.

If the faith is well placed the country might save \$5 billion to \$10 billion a year and no harm done.

If a war somehow does start, the decision could doom 50 million to 150 million Americans who otherwise could be saved, Pentagon studies indicate.

The official doubts about Secretary of Defense McNamara's present "damage-limiting strategy" were revealed by an article in the current Foreign Affairs magazine by Roswell L. Gilpatric, who quit as Deputy Secretary of Defense on January 20.

If the cold war eases a bit, he said, the United States can drop some of its weapons, change some policies and save \$12 billion a year on defense.

The weapons he would drop would cut the ground from under the damage-limiting strategy, Pentagon analysts say.

Mr. Gilpatric is not the only informed civilian to take the proposal seriously, however. Other officials, including Mr. McNamara, have explored them and sounded out the services on changes in the basic nuclear-war policies.

Here are the three choices facing the United States:

First, keep the present moderate damage-limiting policy and weapons. This would retain the "no-city" nuclear-war strategy designed, Mr. McNamara has said, to give the Russian a powerful incentive to avoid hitting American cities during a war, and to keep a fairly adequate array of long-range missiles and bombers and a home defense against a missile-bomber attack.

The existing force, almost all be our only remaining hope civilian and military defense during a war," one official said, but informed defense officials read it differently. Manned interceptors would be "phased out"; there would be no effort at a missile defense; enemy bombers would be left even if the no-city strategy does up to the existing American surface-to-air missile force; the shelter program would be al-

A second alternative, one beginning to be discussed in public, is to spend up to \$25 billion, spread over at least five years, in an effort to limit damage in America even more effectively.

This would require a fallout shelter program costing \$3 to \$5 billion, an anti-missile missile (the Nike-X) costing \$15 to \$20 billion, an improved bomber defense costing \$2 to \$3 billion and possible more ICBMs to destroy enemy missiles.

With this program, plus existing defenses, Pentagon analysts believe, this country could be reasonably sure of saving 130 million Americans even under the worst war conditions.

The third alternative, which has just come to light, would sacrifice the damage-limiting measures.

Gives Clear Outline

Defense officials do not discuss the details, but Mr. Gilpatric's article — which obviously was started before he left the Pentagon though the manuscript did not reach the publisher until after he left — gives a clear outline.

This plan would drop long-range bombers and reduce ICBMs to a Minuteman and Polaris force "capable of destroying the centers of Soviet and Chinese Communist society."

This phrase of Mr. Gilpatric's is used normally by persons advocating a "pure-city" target-missile system. Some top Pentagon officials say Mr. Gilpatric could not possibly want to abandon the no-city strategy ("It would be our only remaining hope during a war," one official said), but informed defense officials read it differently.

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Limited-war forces, in all of these alternatives, would be left the same.

The final choice will not be easy. A trade-off of lives for money—though it is the basic

business of everybody in the Pentagon—is never easy.

With new pressure from Congress and the White House to cut the \$50 billion annual defense budget, the proposed improved damage-limiting posture certainly is a bad bet.

The Gilpatric proposal, on the other hand, would provide a substantial saving—though not nearly as much as Mr. Gilpatric claims, according to Pentagon budget experts.

Nuclear-war forces, defensive and offensive, now cost about \$8 billion a year. An extreme Gilpatric position could save, at best, \$6.5 billion a year.

Within the Pentagon these other arguments are offered in support of the Gilpatric proposal:

1. Studies indicate that bombers in the 1970s could save few American lives (by destroying enemy weapons) compared with the millions that inevitably would be lost in a war under the best circumstances.

2. We have too large an anti-bomber force now. It was designed in the '50s to stop a 2,000-plane attack, but the Russians could stage only a 200-bomber raid today.

3. The proposed modernization and expansion of our defensive forces may be technically or politically impossible. The Nike-X may not work; shelters may be voted down in Congress; American ICBMs may not be able to locate and destroy enemy ICBMs.

Arguments Against

The arguments against dropping the damage-limiting policy are these:

1. No President can risk millions of American lives on the assumption that general war can successfully be deferred.

2. It will be clear within a year that the new weapons will work, and that Congress will approve shelters.

3. Abandonment of the damage-limitation effort would force the United States to withdraw its promise to help defend Europe, if necessary, with strategic nuclear weapons, which will cripple the Atlantic Alliance.